VETERANS REVIEW AND APPEAL BOARD

2012-13

Report on Plans and Priorities

The Honourable Steven Blaney, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Veterans Affairs

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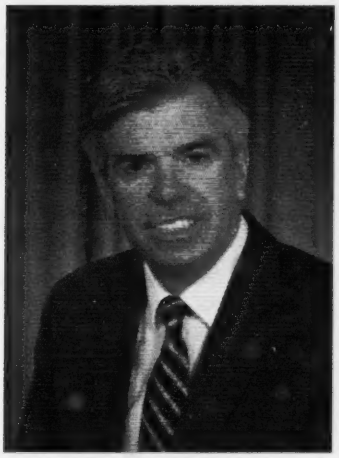
Chair's Message



I am pleased to present the 2012-2013 Report on Plans and Priorities for the Veterans Review and Appeal Board.

The Board exists to ensure that Veterans, Canadian Forces and Royal Canadian Mounted Police members, and their families receive the benefits to which they are entitled under the law. We do this by providing an independent avenue of appeal for disability decisions made by Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC).

Our job is to provide Veterans with fair, impartial, and accessible hearings, and to issue clear decisions in a timely manner. We do this for the most complex and challenging cases, since the straightforward ones are approved by VAC. In the coming year, we will look for ways to deal more efficiently with these cases as we complete an initiative to redesign our business processes. The goal is to improve our program delivery and make our process faster and easier for Veterans.

Increasingly, Veterans want to know more about how the Board makes decisions. With this in mind, communications will remain one of our top priorities in the coming year. We will continue to strengthen our engagement with stakeholders who provide valuable feedback and suggestions on how we can serve Veterans better.

Privacy and the protection of personal information are top priorities at the Board. In 2012-2013, we will continue to strengthen our privacy practices to ensure they meet the highest possible standards.

The Board carries out its work with a strong sense of responsibility to those who have served Canada. Members and staff are professional, hard-working, and committed to treating Veterans with respect. Together, we will meet this year's challenges with enthusiasm and optimism.

John D. Larlee
Chair, Veterans Review and Appeal Board

Section I – Organizational Overview

Raison d'être

The Veterans Review and Appeal Board is an independent, quasi-judicial tribunal created in 1995. The Board provides an appeal program for service-related disability decisions made by Veterans Affairs Canada. This program gives applicants two levels of redress for disability pension and disability award decisions and the final level of appeal for War Veterans Allowance claims.

The Board's objective is to ensure that Canada's traditional Veterans, Canadian Forces members and Veterans, Royal Canadian Mounted Police applicants, qualified civilians and their families receive the disability pensions, disability awards and other benefits to which they are entitled under the law.

Responsibilities

The Board: an Administrative Tribunal
Administrative tribunals like the Board are highly specialized in the matters they deal with. They exist to give dissatisfied people a remedy that is less formal, less costly and less time-consuming than the courts. Learn more about the Board's mandate and organization.

The Board's work is governed by the:

- *Veterans Review and Appeal Board Act*; and
- *Veterans Review and Appeal Board Regulations*.

Applications for review and appeal can be made to the Board under the:

- *Pension Act*;
- *Canadian Forces Members and Veterans Re-establishment and Compensation Act - Part 3* (New Veterans Charter);
- *War Veterans Allowance Act*;
- *Royal Canadian Mounted Police Pension Continuation Act*; and
- *Royal Canadian Mounted Police Superannuation Act*.

What does the Board do for ill and injured Veterans?
The Board ensures that Canada's Veterans receive the disability benefits to which they are entitled under the law. To do this, the Board offers two levels of redress for Veterans who are dissatisfied with decisions made by Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC, the Department).

Review hearings are conducted by panels of two Board Members in approximately 30 locations across the country. Veterans have the opportunity to appear in person before fair, impartial decision-makers where they can give oral testimony and bring evidence and witnesses in support of their case.

Appeal hearings are conducted primarily in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island by panels of three Board Members who did not hear the case at Review. While the legislation does not permit oral testimony at this level, the appeal hearing provides a further opportunity for applicants, through their representative, to submit new information and make arguments in support of their case.

All hearings are non-adversarial, which means no one argues against the Veteran. Learn more about the Board's hearings.

An Independent Appeal Process
The Board operates at arm's-length from the Department to provide an independent appeal process. As independent adjudicators, Board Members are not bound by previous decisions and will change them to benefit Veterans if there is credible evidence.

What kind of cases does the Board hear?
Decisions appealed to the Board represent the most complex and challenging cases, since the straightforward ones are approved by VAC. Many applicants are satisfied with their departmental decisions and only a small percentage come to the Board for an independent appeal. In 2010-2011, approximately 10% of VAC's 41,000 disability decisions were appealed to the Board.

The Board reviews decisions related to:

- disability pensions or awards
- special awards, including Attendance Allowance, Exceptional Incapacity Allowance and Clothing Allowance
- dependent/survivor benefits
- War Veterans Allowance appeals

The Board also hears applications for compassionate awards.

The top five medical conditions in applications to the Board:

- back conditions (lumbar or degenerative disc disease, lumbar spine)
- knee conditions (osteoarthritis)
- hearing loss
- tinnitus
- neck conditions (cervical disc disease)

Workload and Outcomes
The Board issues approximately 4,500 decisions annually, three-quarters of which are Review and one-quarter Appeal. The Board manages this workload with up to 29 permanent Board Members and 85 operational staff.

In 2010-2011, the Board ruled favourably in approximately half of Reviews and a third of Appeals. These favourability rates are due, in part, to the Board's ability to give applications a fresh new look, receive new evidence, and hear testimony from the Veteran and witnesses. Learn more about the Board's workload statistics.

Board Members
Members are independent, impartial adjudicators. Their job is to decide whether the evidence meets the requirements of the legislation to award new or increased levels of disability benefits.

To do this, they:

- conduct hearings where they listen to testimony and arguments and weigh all the evidence;
- make a full and fair examination of available information;
- interpret and apply the legislation based on the evidence presented; and
- write clear and well-reasoned decisions.

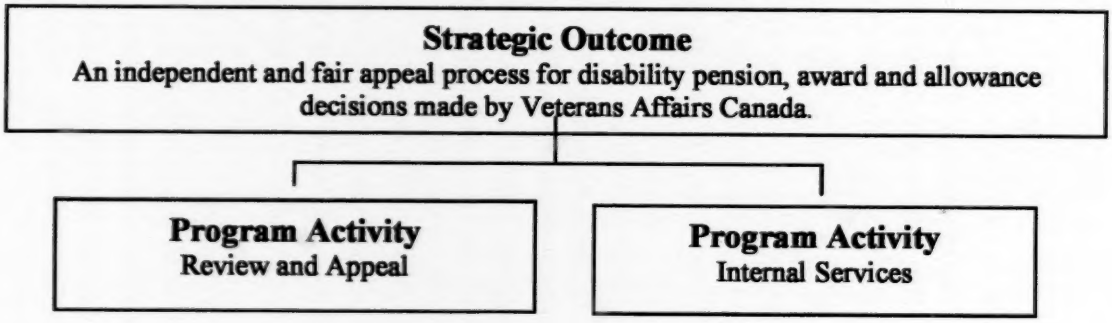
Members are appointed through a transparent, merit-based selection process that recognizes the value of military, medical, policing, and legal backgrounds. Before hearing cases, all new Members undergo a rigorous training program, and receive ongoing and specialized training from medical, legal, military and lay experts. Learn more about Members and the Member Selection Process.

Transparency
The Board is committed to increasing transparency in the decision-making process by providing clear decisions and easily-accessible information on our Web site. In 2012-2013, the Board will publish more decision-making resources, including Noteworthy Decisions and annotated legislation.

Communication
The Board will continue to focus on increasing communications with Veterans and Canadians. In the coming year, the Board will continue its broader outreach initiative to meet with newer Veterans organizations while maintaining relationships with more established stakeholders. These groups provide helpful perspectives and suggestions on how to improve service to Veterans.

Privacy
The Board has strengthened its approach to safeguarding the personal information in its care. It has reviewed and limited employees' access to systems containing client information, introduced mandatory training, and communicated regular reminders to reinforce the "need-to-know" principle for employees. In 2012-2013, the Board will continue to review its processes through a privacy lens to ensure they meet the highest possible standards.

Strategic Outcome and Program Activity Architecture (PAA)


Strategic Outcome
An independent and fair appeal process for disability pension, award and allowance decisions made by Veterans Affairs Canada.
Program Activity
Review and Appeal
Program Activity
Internal Services

Organizational Priorities

The Veterans Review and Appeal Board has three operational priorities and one management priority which link to the Board's strategic outcome. The operational priorities outline the planned actions to be taken to improve the delivery of the Board's program in order to achieve better results for Canadians. The management priority is focussed on improving internal practices and controls in order to strengthen overall performance.

Priority	Type[1]	Strategic Outcome
Program Delivery	Ongoing	An independent and fair appeal process for disability pension, award and allowance decisions made by Veterans Affairs Canada.

Description

Why is this a priority?
It ensures applicants have an avenue of redress by an independent tribunal for disability compensation and War Veterans Allowance applications.

Plans for meeting the priority

- Maximize opportunities for applicants to have their cases heard at the earliest opportunity
- Focus on internal processes to meet post-hearing commitment to issue decisions within six weeks of the hearings

Priority	Type	Strategic Outcome
Improved Program Delivery	Ongoing	An independent and fair appeal process for disability pension, award and allowance decisions made by Veterans Affairs Canada.

Description

Why is this a priority?
Enhancing program delivery through innovation and the use of technology improves the process for applicants.

Plans for meeting the priority

- Conduct a Business Process Redesign of the Review and Appeal Hearing Processes

1. Type is defined as follows: **previously committed to**—committed to in the first or second fiscal year prior to the subject year of the report; **ongoing**—committed to at least three fiscal years prior to the subject year of the report; and **new**—newly committed to in the reporting year of the RPP or DPR.

Priority	Type	Strategic Outcome
Communication	Ongoing	An independent and fair appeal process for disability pension, award and allowance decisions made by Veterans Affairs Canada.

Description

Why is this a priority?
It ensures applicants and all Canadians have information on the Board's mandate, program, and redress process, while meeting the increasing information needs of applicants.

Plans for meeting the priority

- Continue outreach with Veterans organizations and stakeholders
- Publish additional information such as Noteworthy Decisions on the Board's Web site

Priority	Type	Strategic Outcome
Accountable Management	Ongoing	An independent and fair appeal process for disability pension, award and allowance decisions made by Veterans Affairs Canada.

Description

Why is this a priority?
To provide an effective program for applicants and their families by focussing on management, transparency and accountability.

Plans for meeting the priority

- Continue to strengthen privacy practices and the handling and protection of personal information
- Allocate resources to priorities and continue to integrate risk management practices throughout the Board

Risk Analysis

Operating Environment

The Board carries out its mandate within a complex and changing environment. The fluctuating volume of applications and the nature of the medical conditions and interrelationships influence the workload. In the midst of pressures to improve the appeal program, provide better service and increase efficiency, the Board is faced with budget restraint and limited resources. On-going media interest is highlighting the need to strengthen communications with applicants and stakeholders. As well, the Board must respond and adjust to changes in its workforce, technology and the evolving information needs of applicants. Integrating risk management throughout the Board ensures an environment where Members and staff identify potential issues and implement strategies to reduce any possible impacts.

Program Delivery

The Board is always looking for opportunities to improve its processes to serve applicants efficiently and effectively. The Board is conducting a Business Process Redesign to identify improvements which will increase efficiency and provide better service.

Communication

As the pace of information sharing and communication accelerates, individuals are looking for timely and detailed information on the appeal process and decision-making resources. The Board's challenge is to balance these requests with the need to ensure the privacy of personal information. The Board is committed to expanding its Web site to provide Noteworthy Decisions and other decision-making resources. In developing an approach for publishing Noteworthy Decisions that are of general public interest or importance, the Board has taken great care to balance the open court principle with applicants' privacy. Based on guidance from the Office of the Privacy Commissioner for tribunals operating in the digital age, the Board has chosen to remove personal information that is not relevant to the reasons for the decision. The Board will continue to broaden its outreach activities with Veterans and stakeholders to share information and gain feedback on its program.

Accountable Management

The Board is funded through annual appropriations and its operations are impacted by changes in funding approved through Parliament. The Board is experiencing a significant increase in the demands on its limited resources and is challenged to meet its responsibilities in an evolving environment. The Board has a multi-year Integrated Business and Human Resources Plan to proactively prioritize resources, spending initiatives and address emerging pressures.

The Board and VAC collaborate on operational matters while respecting each other's distinct mandates and the Board's institutional and adjudicative independence. The Board also meets with representatives and members of Veterans organizations to discuss operational issues related to the hearing process and to share information.

In the coming year, the Board will continue to identify improvements to its processes and provide efficient and fair service to applicants.

As required, the Board recruits Members or staff to replace those who are departing to ensure adequate operational support to the appeal process. The Board continues to develop plans and extensive training programs to prepare its staff for the future. The Board is launching a Business Process Redesign project to identify improvements which increase flexibility and efficiency in the appeal process.

Planning Summary

Financial Resources ($ millions)

2012–13	2013–14	2014–15
11.5	11.5	11.5

Human Resources (Full-Time Equivalent—FTE)

2012–13	2013–14	2014–15
121	121	121

Strategic Outcome: An independent and fair appeal process for disability pension, award and allowance decisions made by Veterans Affairs Canada.

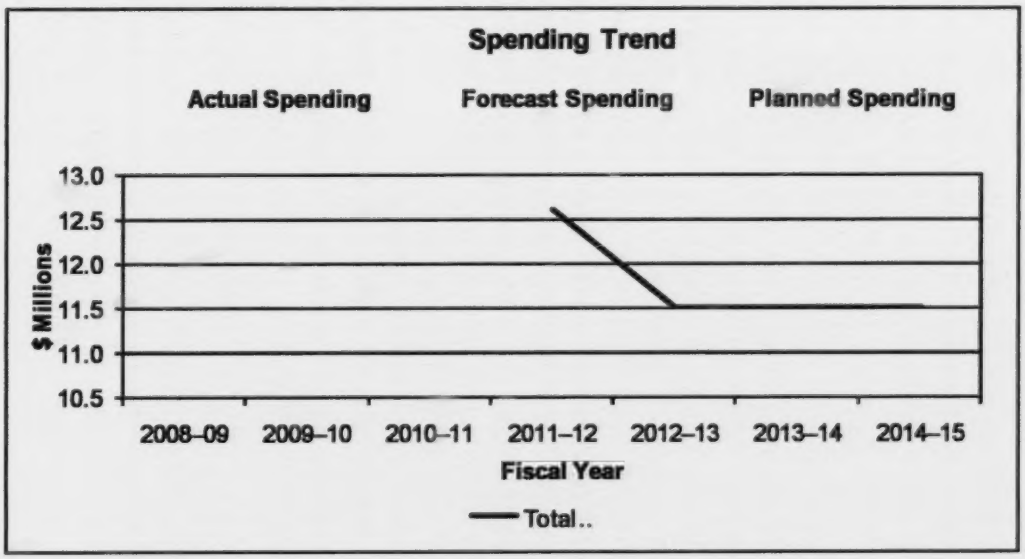
Performance Indicators	Targets
Percentage of Board decisions overturned by the Federal Court	Less than 2% of Board decisions are overturned by the Federal Court

Planning Summary Table

Program Activity	Forecast Spending 2011–12	Planned Spending			Alignment to Government of Canada Outcomes
		2012–13	2013–14	2014–15	
Review and Appeal	12.6	11.5	11.5	11.5	Income Security and Employment for Canadians. Click here for more information.
Internal Services	Internal Services to support the operations of the Veterans Review and Appeal Board are provided by Veterans Affairs Canada through its Vote 1 – Operating Expenditures.				
Total Planned Spending		**11.5**	**11.5**	**11.5**	

Expenditure Profile

Departmental Spending Trend



Planned spending for the Veterans Review and Appeal Board is expected to remain constant over the three-year planning period. Forecast spending in 2011-2012 was increased by approximately $1 million due to the payout of severance and termination benefits related to the revision of specific collective agreements. The 2011-2012 Report on Plans and Priorities was the first stand-alone report for the Board. Spending for previous years was reported as part of the Veterans Affairs Portfolio.

Estimates by Vote

For information on the Board's organizational appropriations, please see the 2012–13 Main Estimates publication.

Section II - Analysis of Program Activities by Strategic Outcome

Strategic Outcome: An independent and fair appeal process for disability pension, award and allowance decisions made by Veterans Affairs Canada

Program Activity 1.1: Review and Appeal

Program Activity Description

The Veterans Review and Appeal Board's program activity delivers the independent review and appeal process for disability pension and disability award decisions made by Veterans Affairs Canada. It provides two levels of appeal for Veterans, Canadian Forces members, Royal Canadian Mounted Police applicants, and their families who are dissatisfied with their disability pension and disability award decisions. The Board conducts hearings and issues written decisions. The Board's other key functions include hearing reviews and appeals of special award decisions made by Veterans Affairs Canada relating to attendance allowances, exceptional incapacity allowances and clothing allowances; hearing the final level of appeal for War Veterans Allowance decisions; and granting compassionate awards.

Financial Resources ($ millions)

2012–13	2013–14	2014–15
11.5	11.5	11.5

Human Resources (Full-Time Equivalent—FTE)

2012–13	2013–14	2014–15
121	121	121

Program Activity Expected Results	Performance Indicators	Targets
Applicants are provided with a fair appeal process.	Percentage of cases that meet criteria for fair proceedings and quality decisions.	Target is "Meet Expectations" on a scale currently being developed.
	Percentage of decisions issued within the published service standard.	80%

Planning Highlights

In order to achieve the expected result, the Veterans Review and Appeal Board plans to undertake the following activities:

- The Board is maximizing hearing opportunities for applicants by offering video conference and teleconference hearings. The Board will continue to focus on internal processes to meet its post-hearing commitment to issue decisions within six weeks of the hearing.
- The Board is responding to the changing disability program environment by undertaking a redesign of its business processes. This project will review current processes to identify opportunities and implement improvements to the appeal program.
- The Board is meeting with Veterans organizations and stakeholders to build relationships and to provide opportunities for information sharing. To enhance its outreach, The Board continues to develop publications and Web site updates to inform applicants and Canadians about the Board.
- The Board will strengthen privacy practices to improve the handling and protection of personal information. The Board will allocate resources to priorities and continue to integrate risk management strategies throughout the Board.

Strategic Outcome: An independent and fair appeal process for disability pension, award and allowance decisions made by Veterans Affairs Canada

Program Activity 1.2: Internal Services

Program Activity Description

Internal services to support the operations of the Veterans Review and Appeal Board are provided by Veterans Affairs Canada through its Vote 1 – Operating Expenditures. This relationship has been in place since the Board was created in 1995 and continues to capitalize on the efficiencies presented by the Portfolio Department providing internal services to a very small Portfolio member. A Memorandum of Understanding dated 28 February 2011 between the Veterans Review and Appeal Board and Veterans Affairs Canada describes the internal services that are provided on an ongoing basis. These services are provided without charge to the Veterans Review and Appeal Board appropriations, with the exception of telecommunications, information technology hardware and certain program evaluation services. As part of this agreement, the Board's targets and reporting on the Departmental Sustainable Development Strategy are included in the Veterans Affairs Portfolio-wide report. An electronic version of the report is available on the Department's Web site.

Planning Highlights

In order to achieve the expected result, the Veterans Review and Appeal Board plans to undertake the following activity:

- Work within the Memorandum of Understanding for Internal Services developed with Veterans Affairs Canada.

Section III – Supplementary Information

Financial Highlights

The future-oriented financial highlights presented within the *2012-13 Report on Plans and Priorities* are intended to serve as a general overview of the Veterans Review and Appeal Board's financial position and operations. These financial highlights are prepared on an accrual basis to strengthen accountability and improve transparency and financial management.

Future-Oriented - Condensed Statement of Operations
For the Year (ended March 31)
($ millions)

	$ Change	Future-Oriented 2012-13	Future-Oriented 2011-12
Total Expenses	(1.0)	13.2	14.2
Total Revenues		0	0
Net Cost of Operations	(1.0)	13.2	14.2

Condensed Statement of Financial Position
For the Year (ended March 31)
($ millions)

	$ Change	Future-Oriented 2012-13	Future-Oriented 2011-12
Total assets	(0.08)	.22	.30
Total liabilities	0.02	1.18	1.16
Equity	(0.10)	(0.96)	(0.86)
Total	(0.08)	0.22	0.30

Future-Oriented Financial Statements

The planned spending for Veterans Review and Appeal Board as reported on a modified-cash basis for 2012-13 is $11.5 million. This amount has been adjusted by estimated amounts for services provided without charge (i.e. accommodations, government payments to employee insurance plans, etc.) and amortization of capital assets, to arrive at a future-oriented total expense of $13.2 million for 2012-13.

Future-oriented financial statements can be found on the Board's Web site.

List of Supplementary Information Tables

All electronic supplementary information tables found in the *2012–13 Reports on Plans and Priorities* can be found on the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat Web site.

- Greening Government Operations

Section IV: Other Items of Interest

Organizational Contact Information

For more information, visit the Board's Web site at www.vrab-tacra.gc.ca or contact the Board at:

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